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For Starters (WS48)

Anarchist view of the election of Joe Higgins in
Dublin

Workers Solidarity Movement

1996

The Dublin West by-election gave the establishment a shock. Only 41% bothered to vote (most of the rest presumably being apathetic, i.e. feeling that it wouldn't make much difference to them), the Labour vote collapsed from 23% down to 3.8%, and Militant Labour's Joe Higgins came within 370 votes of taking the seat.

Now there is talk (mainly by Militant Labour but also by activists in the anti-water charges campaign) of running a slate of candidates in the next general election. During the run up to the ballot the WSM argued against that way of doing things. We explained our point of view through the free bulletin Anarchist News. While paying tribute to Joe Higgins for the trojan work he has done to build the anti-water charges campaign we went on to say "The Workers Solidarity Movement is not standing a candidate, nor are we urging a vote for anyone.

"We advise you to abstain. It is not just a question of how dishonest and corrupt most politicians become, nor that they say one thing before an election and do something totally different when elected. [Remember Democratic Left getting elected

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on an anti-water charges ticket, now they are in a government that is dragging pensioners into court while the beef barons go free after multi-million pound frauds.]

“The crucial question is whether casting a vote every few years can give you any control over the things that effect your life. Many will vote for Joe Higgins or Tomas MacGiolla because of their anti-establishment stands. But neither can change the system which makes the working class pay through the nose while the rich live it up.

“Real power lies in the boardrooms of big business. They decide where to invest and on what terms. To see the power of money over democracy you only have to look at the beef scandal. To see how far the bosses will go you can look at Chile in 1973 where a reforming government was overthrown by a military coup backed by big business. As long as a small minority have massive power they will be the ones calling the tune.

Don't vote – it only encourages them

“To think that elections provide a real choice, that they can fundamentally change things, is an illusion. Once your vote is cast you have had your “say”. You have given your consent to a politician or party to make decisions for you. The political system where a few give the orders and the rest obey has been given your personal stamp of approval.

“We don't abstain because are opposed to democracy. Not at all, we are fully in favour of it. By democracy we understand the right of people to manage their own lives and collectively organise society in their own interests. Everyone effected a decision should have the possibility of helping to make that decision.

“This means workers' councils running industries & services, neighbourhood councils in our communities. These would be federated upwards on a regional and national level. All delegates would be subject to immediate recall if their electors were not satisfied with their conduct.

“The outstanding feature of the anarchist idea is that control comes from below. There would be no ruling elite. In this by-election you are being asked to change one of your, admittedly minor, rulers. Anarchists don't want to change the faces in the Dáil; we want to get rid of the division into bosses & workers, order-givers & order-takers.”

Over the next few months the big task is to organise enough people to ensure that non-payment holds, that more local action groups are formed and that every attempt at a disconnection of water supply is met by local resistance. When the government sees all its threats and promises fail and learns that this tax is truly uncollectable, that is when they will look at ways of amending it. If we have a strong enough campaign on the ground we won't have to settle for a compromise, we can have a victory.

And finally, while we were reprinting *Anarchism and Ireland* we received two new editions of other WSM pamphlets. Eddie Conlon's *The Spanish Civil War: Anarchism in Action* has been published in a Serbo-Croat version from Belgrade and Ireland & British Imperialism (a collection of articles from *Workers Solidarity* dealing all aspects of the 'national question') has been produced in a French edition.

Anarchism and Ireland is a short introduction to the ideas of anarchism, covering all the basics from “why we oppose the state” to “what we mean by freedom”.